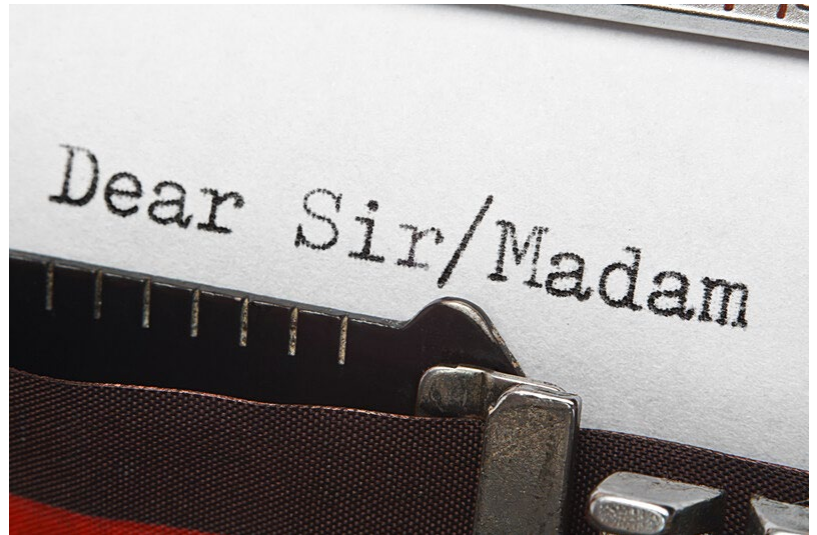


Word for Word

Formally or formerly?

Formally and *formerly* have completely different meanings, but the spellings and pronunciations of these two adverbs are so similar that one is often used when the other is meant.

Formally is most commonly used to describe acting in a prescribed or customary form, with formality, or ceremoniously.¹



Examples:

Lily was excited to receive a letter formally confirming her appointment to assistant professor.

Plans for the new research facility were formally unveiled in a ceremony attended by faculty and community leaders.

In contrast, *formerly* refers to being in the past or to events that occurred previously.²

Examples:

Dr. Harris was formerly affiliated with the Mayo Clinic but recently joined the faculty at Johns Hopkins University.

The study analyzed resting metabolic rates in formerly obese men and women.

References

1. Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language (unabridged). Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Company; 1976:893.
2. Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language

(unabridged). Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Company; 1976:894.

--Dawn Chalaire

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